

My Formal Resignation Letter

A letter by Rep. Mike Garcia detailing the hardships placed on servicemembers due to low quality of life and poverty level pay from the perspective of an active duty servicemember.

To whom it may concern,

This letter is written to officially notify you that I will not be continuing my service at the end of my commitment. While I have enjoyed serving in the U.S. military, I have found the sacrifices too costly relative to the fulfillment of serving my country and quality of life.

Amid record low Department of Defense (DoD) recruitment and retention, this letter serves not only as a notification of resignation, but also a genuine attempt to convey “why” I’m leaving. My hope is that the DoD leadership (including the President of the United States) and Congress will address and resolve these issues. I want only the best for my nation and for its military to be more attractive to future servicemembers than it is for our current servicemembers.

I knew when I enlisted that my base pay would start at \$21,000 per year. While this is anemic pay, I was willing to enlist for that much. This is roughly \$12 per hour when normalized on a 40-hour weekly income. After three years of service, I am just now making the equivalent of \$15 per hour. With the current record inflation rates at 8%, the roughly 4% pay raises each year actually put my family in the hole. **Is there any chance that Congress can raise base pay for junior enlisted personnel and tie our pay raises to the current inflation indices so that we are earning *at least* the same as a McDonald’s worker?**

Despite the low base pay, I figured between my salary and my wife’s salary as a nurse, we would be able to make ends meet if we lived on base housing and were able to take advantage of the day care services on base for our three-year-old daughter. Unfortunately, when we received our first orders after boot camp, we learned that my wife would need to requalify and recertify as a Registered Nurse because military spouses aren’t offered reciprocity for professional licenses when they move on military orders in some states. This process ended up costing us thousands of dollars and six months, resulting in a massive loss in earnings. **Is there some way to allow active duty military spouses to receive reciprocity for their professional licenses across all state lines without having to wait and pay for the credentials all over again?**

When we arrived in California, we were told there was a wait to get into base housing due to massive renovations of the old housing units due to asbestos issues. My admin department told

me I would qualify for a \$2,700 housing allowance since I was forced to live in town. But unfortunately, the rents in the local community for a two-bedroom place in the safe parts of town started at \$2,500. So, after utilities, insurance, and gas for driving to and from base, we were losing about \$500 (or about 25% of my net base pay) each month on that deal. **Is there some way to ensure the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is directly tied to the current rental home market?**

The other surprise we encountered when we arrived at our duty station was that the on-base childcare facility was not available anymore. We could apply for day care assistance but, again, the subsidy was not enough to cover the costs of day care in town. **How is it that we still have major bases in the U.S. that do not have decent childcare for our children?**

I was deployed to Afghanistan just three months after we arrived at our home station. With work ups and training, my wife was effectively forced to be a single mom trying to not only raise our daughter, but also keep her hours at the hospital. We knew this was a common strain on military families, but we were willing to work through all of this in the interest of serving our beautiful nation.

My first tour to Afghanistan in early 2019 was rewarding, and I was proud of the progress the U.S. had provided our allies there over the course of the last twenty years during the Global War on Terror. My unit felt comfortable with the prospects of a smooth transition and departure from Afghanistan, and I had confidence that my leadership and chain of command had a solid plan to make sure we could end this two-decade conflict, come home safely, and not relinquish control back to the Taliban.

We were also hopeful that during this down time, we would be provided with refreshed equipment. During our deployment, we lost five members of our platoon because the transport helicopter had a maintenance failure, attributed by a fatigued airframe. The helicopter literally fell apart in midair. Unfortunately, the time between deployments was not used to replace or upgrade our equipment. Instead, we spent that time doing patch work on the existing systems, knowing that we would not be able to get them up to the readiness levels we needed for our next deployment. **Is there some way Congress, the Pentagon and Industry can work together to ensure our weapons and equipment are modern and safe before we put our lives on the line? Can they shorten the acquisition timelines so we can get equipment sooner?**

As I was promoted to E-4 in mid 2020, my wife and I were still struggling to pay the bills. Before that time, we had qualified for food stamps, but the pay raise attached to my E-4 promotion put us above the food stamps qualification levels. Using food stamps while in uniform

at the grocery store was one of the most degrading experiences of my life. But I had to do it to avoid insurmountable credit card debt.

I figured if I worked hard and studied for the promotion tests every day, I could be promoted to E-5 by the end of 2021. If I was able to do that, my family would finally be able to slightly breathe financially. But 2021 ended up being the year that everything changed dramatically, and the financial challenges and any study time took a backseat.

In April of 2021, we were in our barracks when our Commander in Chief delivered a press conference. While I'm not a fan of his politics, President Joe Biden is still my Commander in Chief, and my unit was pretty good about not being political, especially while in uniform. But I remember how angry we all were that day when he announced to the world (before he even told his troops), that he was committed to an unconditional withdrawal from Afghanistan by 9/11/21. I remember thinking, "why the hell would you tell our enemies when we are pulling out before actually making provisions to do it correctly? And why unconditionally?"

Morale was very low. We didn't have the highest regard for our leadership, our operational tempo remained high because our generals wanted to keep flexing their muscle rather than resting their troops and equipment. And we all saw the writing on the wall about the upcoming disaster in Afghanistan. While we only had 2,500 troops left in Afghanistan, the nation was very stable, and we hadn't lost a single American in over a year there. We all wanted to pull out, but not this way.

Watching the situation in Afghanistan was like rowing in a lifeboat for twenty years, getting to within a mile of the beach, and having your Skipper pull out a knife to cut a giant hole in the boat. We were so close to wrapping up the campaign in a clean and orderly fashion. Instead, we knew that last mile was going to be painful and dangerous. We knew that last mile was going to cost more American lives, and empower the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. And it did.

In the days following the pull out in July of 2021, our unit ended up getting an emergency surge deployment notification with 48 hours' notice. You can imagine the turmoil this caused all our families. Within a few days we were once again boots on the ground in Kabul. Now, instead of 2,500 Americans in the entire country, there were 7,000 of us in one city. Instead of executing a smooth, coordinated handoff on our terms with our Afghan partners and the new government, we had abandoned them in the middle of the night and basically signed their death warrants. And now, instead of being keepers of peace and stability, we were surrounded by the Taliban and hundreds of Al-Qaeda killers that were released from Bagram prison just a few days before we arrived.

By mid-August, we were convinced that most of us would be killed as we tried to mop up the mess and get all Americans out before time expired. I recall the overwhelming feeling of betrayal when I realized that our President and our State Department were willing to leave before all Americans were evacuated. And where was Secretary of Defense Austin then? Why did operational control remain with the State Department even after the bullets started flying and lives were lost? This was a damn war zone, and we were being led by diplomats instead of the DoD. Strategic decisions were made by the State Department instead of the Department of Defense. We held olive branches while the bad guys held bombs.

The leaders had already stranded American civilians, Afghan SIV partners, and we were convinced they were going to sacrifice or strand most of us who were surrounded by mobs of desperate people and terrorists as we watched fewer and fewer C-17's come in to rescue folks. The death of thirteen of our fellow patriots and hundreds of Afghan civilians on August 26th at the gates of Karzai airport in Kabul was a massive gut punch to us all. We thought it was just a matter of time before our entire unit suffered the same fate.

But as painful as the loss of our brothers and sisters was, nothing compared to the pain we all felt when our President called the operation a "success" on August 31st. After looking at his watch several times while our fallen troops were unloaded from the cargo planes back at home, President Biden, my Commander, had the audacity to call this unforced and unmitigated nightmare a "success." This all after we picked up dead humans who had fallen to their deaths on the runway after clinging to the outside of the transport planes just for a chance to go to the U.S.

Calling America's withdrawal from Afghanistan a success is like calling the sinking of the Titanic a success. Lots of people died unnecessarily because leadership failed us. And just because some were saved did not warrant a claim of victory or success. I have no doubt that our weak performance on the global stage during those six months inspired Putin to launch his invasion of Ukraine when he did. No doubt.

I am now within six months of my separation date, and I can no longer serve in the military. After two combat tours, I am seeing my senior leadership spend more time focused on the "woke" training nonsense than our own readiness. We still don't have the equipment we need to be safe. We have lost five percent of our company as they refused to take the COVID vaccine because of religious beliefs, but they were still discharged. We are not ready for our next deployment. We are not ready for war. We are not ready for China.

I do not mind making the financial sacrifices. I do not mind suffering the low quality of life that comes with military service. I am even willing to give my life in defense of this great nation. But what I can't tolerate is weak leadership, politicians, and commanders who neither appreciate their roles as stewards of our military servicemembers or their responsibilities to deter and win wars.

After 247 years, the United States still needs warfighters to either deter, or if unable to deter, kill the bad guys before they harm us. But the warfighters won't show up, or won't stay long, if they are treated like plebes, paid less than minimum wage, and moved like pawns by their leadership.

I'll be committed to the cause of American liberty for my entire life, but not while wearing the military uniform. I implore the White House, Congress, and the Pentagon to do better and to do more so that future generations will be inspired to serve and remain in the service. You are currently failing us.